

The Battle of Cox's Corner

The Kaladan Valley, Burma, 5-7 March 1944

*A Battlefield: WWII Scenario
By R Mark Davies*



'These boys perform all the highly skilled tasks which are necessary in the modern combat machine. Judging from American standards, most of these men would never be in the Army... but relegated to duty as menial labourers. Yet the British have welded them into a mighty fighting force which the enemy has learned to fear... If there are any troops the Japs fear it is the blacks from Africa. As an indication a 'Tokyo' broadcast described them as 'African cannibals led by European fanatics'... In fact they rate among the best-natured troops I have yet encountered. But what the Japs don't like is the ferociousness with which they fight...' J. Brooke, American War Correspondent, writing for the Chicago Post.

'The enemy soldiers are not from Britain but are from Africa. Because of their beliefs, they are not afraid to die, so even if their comrades have fallen they keep on advancing as if nothing had happened. It makes things rather difficult. They have an excellent physique, and are very brave, so fighting against these soldiers is somewhat troublesome.' From a captured Japanese war diary.

Scenario Background

During early 1944, Field Marshal Bill Slim, commanding the British XIVth Army in India, launched a fresh offensive with the Indian XV Corps into the old Kingdom of Arakan (the western coastal strip of Burma, bordering modern-day Bangladesh). The intention was to seize the Japanese airfield at Akyab, which would not only deny Japanese aircraft the ability to hit targets in India but would also allow Allied fighter-bombers the ability to range at will over western Burma, all the way down to Rangoon.

Slim's dynamic new doctrine emphasised the 'Indirect Approach' to an objective – a style of warfare the Japanese had long been masters of. In keeping with this Indirect Doctrine, the 81st (West African) Division was raised with the express purpose of moving deep behind enemy lines, hitting the enemy at a time and place of their choosing, always keeping on the move, travelling light with minimal logistics and all essential needs provided by air power.

81st Division's part in XV Corps' plan was to penetrate the 'impenetrable' Kaladan Valley, which runs parallel to the Arakan coast, but 50-60 miles inland from it and separated by several mountain ridges. A division inserted into the Kaladan could not only outflank the Japanese 28th Army, but could also do enormous damage to the Japanese lines of communication, which went through the town of Myohaung, at the mouth of the Kaladan.

So, in the Dry Season of late 1943 and early 1944, Major General Woolner's 81st (West African) Division, consisting of two West African Brigades and a mere twelve mountain guns, cut their way into the Kaladan and headed south, building a road and cutting airstrips out of the jungle as they went. The Japanese were initially taken completely by surprise – the only garrison force in the Kaladan was the 1st Battalion of the 213th Infantry Regiment (33rd Division),

(known to all as the 'Jumbos' due to their Swahili greeting of '*Jambo!*') crossed the Kaladan, established a firm base on the Pagoda Hill east of Kyauktaw, and once again advanced down the road to Myohaung; feeling very naked and vulnerable now that they were out of the cover of the jungle...

But the Japanese had prepared a reception at Myohaung – a powerful force of four strong battalions had been assembled there and was now advancing on Kyauktaw! The first to encounter the Japanese assault were the East African 'Jumbos'. Being only lightly armed and only trained for light recon tasks, the East Africans were quickly scattered by the veteran Japanese columns. Confusion and panic reigned, as the Gambia Regiment, with 150mm shells landing around them, rapidly pulled out of its positions on the Pagoda Hill and crossed back over to Kyauktaw.

The situation had rapidly changed. The Japanese were striking into the rear of the division, trying to cut its lines of communication, without realising that the lines of communication were in the air! Nevertheless, Woolner was forced to withdraw. His orders from XV Corps now required him to attack west into the Arakan with one brigade, while simultaneously holding off the Japanese counter attack in the east with the other brigade. The West Africans, now thoroughly demoralised by having to retrace their steps without understanding why (they had not suffered many casualties, despite the tactical reverses), now retraced their steps back up the Kaladan, looking forward to the time when they would be back under the safe canopy of the jungle, rather than being exposed in the open plain.

The Japanese meanwhile, were racing to get ahead of them, to contest river crossing points and defiles and to find good blocking positions. All the time, they were still searching in vain for the African lines of communication.

On 4th March, the 5th West African Brigade reached the point at which the Pi Chaung (the other major river in the area, which runs parallel to the Kaladan and a few miles west of it) joins the Kaladan. The brigade plan was to first cross the Praing Chang at Walagan, then proceed up the Pi Chaung for about a kilometre and use the ferry at Thandaung to cross that river and establish a temporary bridge there so that the guns and the few divisional Jeeps could be evacuated across the river. They would then strike east, to reach a known crossing point on the Kaladan River.

Two companies of the 8th Battalion, The Gold Coast Regiment (8 GCR) crossed over the Pi Chaung at Thandaung on the 5th and established a safe bridgehead for the Royal Engineers to establish their ferrying point. 5 GCR was also soon across and began to establish a larger bridgehead and to scout further from the river; 'A' Company went north to occupy a knoll designated Point 172, while 'B' & 'D' Companies, with some East African Scouts, moved east to establish a defensive perimeter along the Kyetpaung Chaung stream. Once the perimeter was established, 5 GCR was ordered to probe further east, toward a series of low ridges that separated the Pi Chaung from the Kaladan. 'C' Company was selected for the task and set out up the path toward the distant hills...

However, the Japanese had already crossed the Kaladan in the east. Major Kobayashi's 3rd Battalion, 111th Infantry Regiment, had just taken up position in the hills and now saw the column of Africans marching towards him...

General Note

This is a Medium-sized scenario, with one (large) battlegroup per side and relatively limited fire support assets.

Victory conditions are simple: this was an encounter battle, fought simply to gain local superiority over the opposing force. Consequently, the Victory Point system in the rulebook will do very well to decide winner and loser, plus VP bonuses for the possession of certain pieces of key terrain.

The game last 24 turns, with the Japanese having the first turn (they opened the battle by initiating an ambush on the Africans).

I should add that I have taken a few liberties with the timescale, in that the scenario packs all the events of a 36 hour period into a single game of 24 turns. As is so often the case in war, there were very long periods when simply nothing happened, which would make for a boring wargame!

Briefing For Lt Col CF Cox, Commanding 5th Bn, The Gold Coast Regiment

Situation

Having established a bridgehead over the Pi Chaung, your next task is to push on eastward to the Kaladan, secure a crossing-point there and start the process all over again. There is no sign of Jap interference yet, but you can be sure that they aren't far away. The lads are fairly jumpy after the reverse at Kyauktaw and the prospect of a long retreat back up the valley, but as ever, they're getting the job done.

8 GCR are holding the inner perimeter around the bridgehead, while your lads have pushed on to establish an outer perimeter. You've established a 'firm base' with 'B' & 'D' Companies on the Kyatpaung Chaung, while 'A' Company has gone north to secure the high ground at Point 172. 'C' Company meanwhile, is moving forward to reconnoitre the line of low hills to the east.

An urgent signal has just arrived by runner from 'B' Company: An 8 GCR patrol has just come into their lines from the southeast. They apparently had a running contact with the enemy in company strength along the bank of the Kaladan – the enemy has clearly crossed the river ahead of you!

You need to warn 'C' Company...

Mission

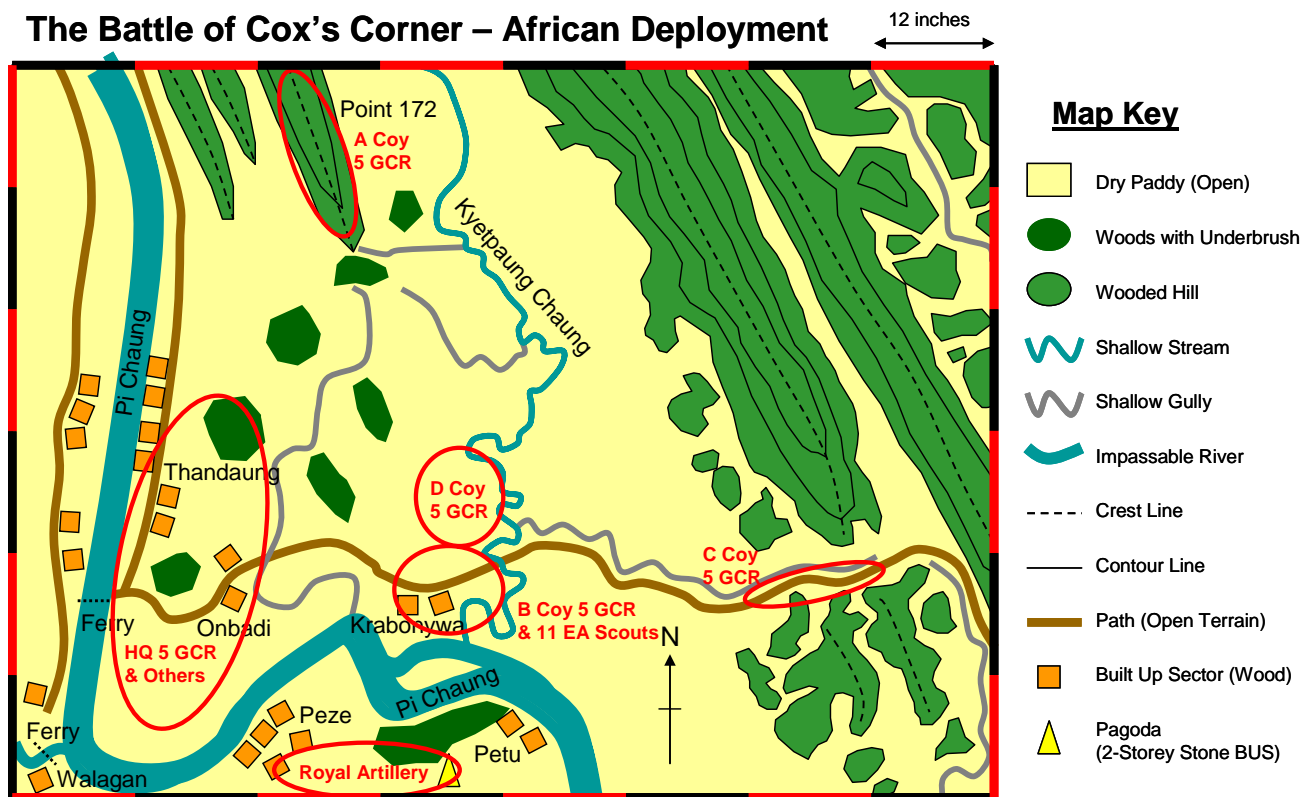
You are to achieve superiority over the enemy force in front of you, with the intention of resuming the brigade's advance to the Kaladan.

Execution

Friendly Forces

- Your forces are listed in the attached order of battle and are deployed as per the map below. No troops may be in improved or hidden positions, as there has not been time to prepare.

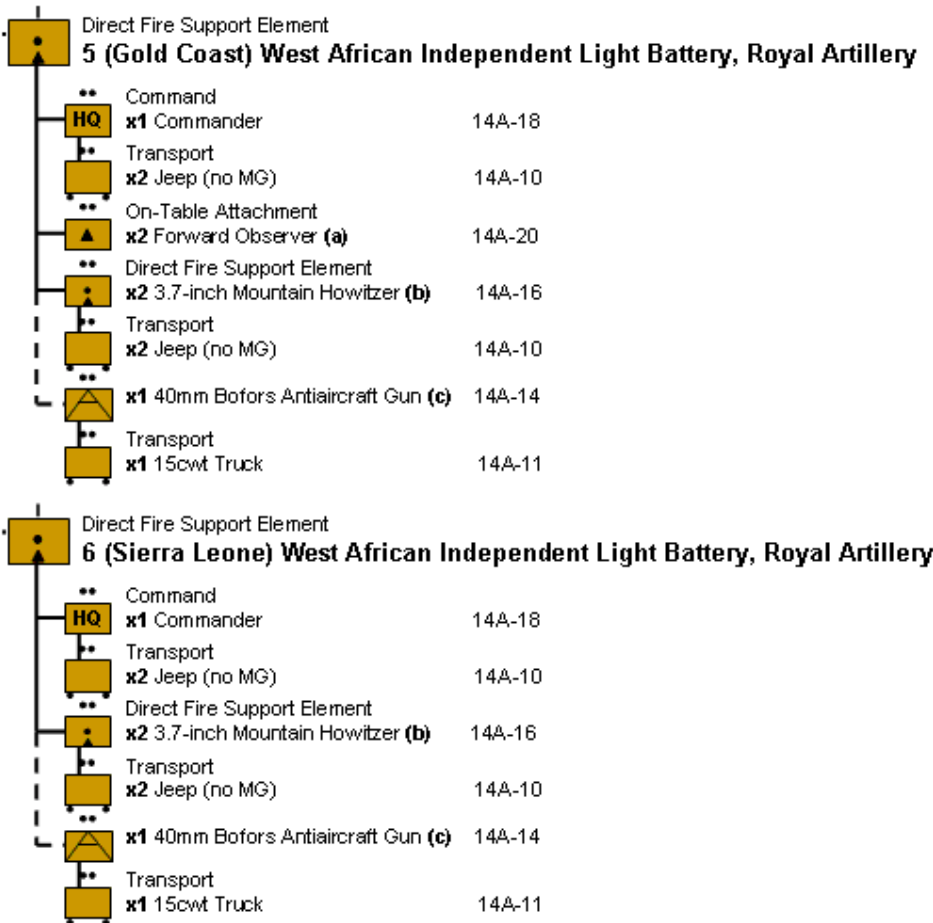
The Battle of Cox's Corner – African Deployment



(Continued from previous page)

Elements, 81st (West African) Division Royal Artillery

Lieutenant Colonel Coltman (d)



(a) 5 GCR have a single Forward Observer attached from 5 Light Battery, while the other is positioned in an OP on the Petu Pagoda, south of the Pi Chung. The two batteries are co-located with the Divisional CRA (Commander Royal Artillery) Lt Col Coltman, who is co-ordinating their fire support. As a result, both 5 & 6 batteries may fire as Direct Support on the call of 5 Battery's FOs.

(b) Each gun model represents a Troop of two guns (these batteries are half the size of 25pdr Field Batteries). Consequently, the artillery may fire Troop missions of x1 gun, Battery missions of x2 guns or 'Regimental' missions of x4 guns (although there wasn't formally a regimental structure here at this time). Although there is only one FO on table, don't forget that Troop elements may also call for fire from Direct Support artillery.

(c) A single troop of Bofors Guns was flown in to 81st Division at the end of February. They were grouped with the division's artillery element to defend it from the slim possibility of Japanese air attack, but they also provided valuable direct fire support against ground targets.

(d) If you lack sufficient table space to include the south bank of the Pi Chung, simply leave the artillery support off-table.

Enemy Forces

- Are in unknown strength.

Air Support

- The Allies have achieved air superiority over Burmese skies in recent months, hence why resupply by air is possible. You haven't caught a sniff of a Japanese aircraft in the three months since the campaign began. However, despite having been promised all the tactical air support you need by Lieutenant General Christison (GOC XV Corps), fighter-bombers have been remarkable thin on the ground and are usually completely ineffective when they do show up!
- From Turn 5 onwards, roll a D10 in each air support phase. On a roll of '0' a close support aircraft becomes available. Roll again to determine the type of air support:
 - 1-4 = Hurricane Mk IIc fighter-bomber armed with bombs (card 14A-26)
 - 5-8 = Vengeance Mk I dive-bomber armed with bombs (website prototype card BR-P85)
 - 9-0 = Hurricane Mk IV armed with bombs (website prototype card BR-P92)
- Any Commander or FO may call for the air strike, rolling on the Forward Air Controller section of the Call for Fire Table.
- Hurricane Mk IIc or Vengeance may return for a second, strafing pass if they have not been Suppressed, Disordered or Knocked Out on their first pass.

Game Sequence

- The Japanese have the first turn.
- The game lasts 24 turns or until one side concedes.

Victory Points

- **1 VP** for each enemy Manoeuvre Element with greater than 25% casualties OR each knocked out Gun.
- **2 VP** for each enemy Manoeuvre Element with greater than 50% casualties.
- **3VP** for each enemy Manoeuvre Element with greater than 75% casualties.
- **5 VP** for having the only un-disordered unit within 5 inches of the ferry.
- **3 VP** for having the only un-disordered unit within 5 inches of the hill marked as Point 172.
- **5 VP** for having the only un-disordered unit within 5 inches of the point where the path exits the eastern table edge.
- **Total Victory** – for having more than 11 VPs or more than the enemy.
- **Partial Victory** – for having 6-10 VPs more than the enemy.
- **Draw** – for having 0-5 VPs more (or less) than the enemy. The side with the higher number can claim a 'Winning Draw'.

Briefing for Major Kobayashi, Commanding 3rd Bn, 111th Infantry Regiment

Situation

Colonel Koba, your regimental commander and the senior officer in the Kaladan, has dispatched your battalion north from Myohaung in order to locate and cut the British lines of communication. Confusingly however, you have been unable to find it! There is plenty of evidence of the passage of troops, including a road that the British have built down the length of the valley – a remarkable achievement – but there does not seem to be any military traffic, which is most puzzling. You have observed the enemy aircraft dropping supplies by parachute, but there is no possibility that an entire division could be supplied in such a manner!

Reconnaissance patrols brought back reports of the enemy making a crossing, in force, of the Pi Chaung, which runs parallel to the Kaladan for many miles and joins with the Kaladan a few miles downstream from your current position. An opportunity has therefore presented itself – if you attack with maximum surprise and aggression, you may be able to catch the enemy force with their backs to the river and destroy it in detail!

Further reconnaissance has revealed the enemy positions to you – the open paddy in the river valley leaves them with few places to hide. You are therefore able to deploy your forces accordingly – the enemy company isolated on Point 172 makes a tempting target – you could concentrate forces there and entirely destroy that company, which would have the added advantage of flanking the entire enemy position...

But wait! What's this? It seems that the enemy is making his next move – a company-sized force is advancing in column, directly towards you! You had better prepare a surprise for him...

Mission

You are to attack the enemy bridgehead, with the intention of destroying the forces on this side of the Pi Chaung.

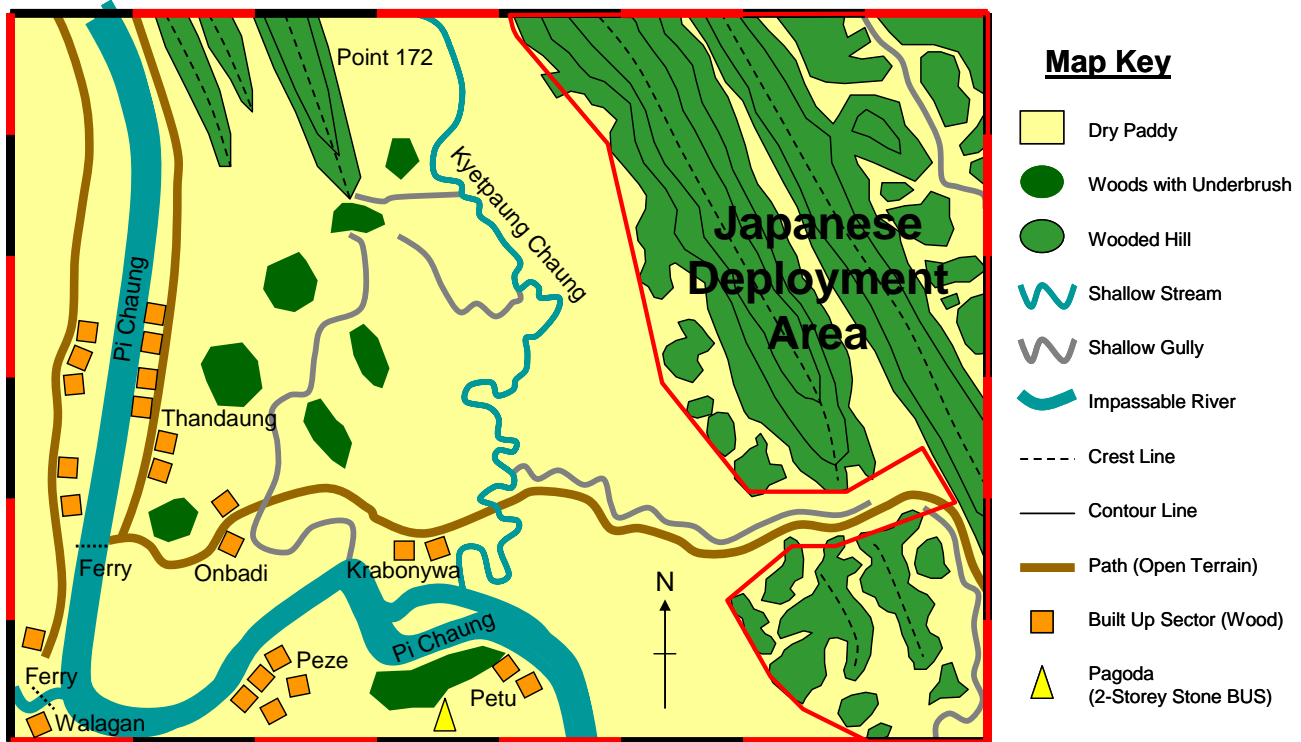
Execution

Friendly Forces

- Your forces are detailed in the attached order of battle – you have your entire battalion at your disposal and you are at full strength. There is no possibility of support or reinforcement.

The Battle of Cox's Corner – Japanese Deployment

12 inches



- You may deploy, as Hidden Unit markers anywhere within the area shown on the map, once the African player has finished his deployment. No units may improve their positions, but you may place **x15** Dummy Unit markers.

The Battle of Cox's Corner, 5-7 March 1944

Japanese Order of Battle



BATTLEGROUP

3rd Battalion, 111th Infantry Regiment, 54th Infantry Division

Major Kobayashi

Command
HQ x1 Commander JA-19

MANOEUVRE ELEMENTS

Manoeuvre Element
9th Company (c)

Manoeuvre Element
10th Company
 Command
HQ x1 Commander JA-19
 x12 Riflemen JA-17
 x3 Type 89 Grenade Discharger JA-25

Manoeuvre Element
11th Company
 Command
HQ x1 Commander JA-19
 x12 Riflemen JA-17
 x3 Type 89 Grenade Discharger JA-25

Manoeuvre Element
12th Company
 Command
HQ x1 Commander JA-19
 x12 Riflemen JA-17
 x3 Type 89 Grenade Discharger JA-25

Manoeuvre Element
Machine Gun Company (b)
 Command
HQ x1 Commander JA-19
 x6 Type 92 Heavy Machine Gun JA-21

ATTACHMENTS

Organic Fire Support
x2 Type 92 70mm Battalion Gun JA-10
 Transport
x2 Pack Mules

(a) All Japanese elements are rated as 'Veteran'.

(b) The Battalion MG Company may alternatively be reduced to **x3** MMGs, with the remaining MMGs attached directly to the rifle companies (**x1** per rifle company).

(c) Kobayashi's 9th Company was absent at this time. It was escorting the 111th Regiment's Gun Company, which was sailing up the Kaladan River from Akyab.

Enemy Forces

- The enemy forces consist of a reinforced infantry battalion. It is not known if they have artillery support close enough to lend assistance. However, the enemy does have air superiority and has occasionally used fighter-bombers in the Kaladan Valley during the last few weeks. However, most of the air activity seems to be restricted to transport aircraft and their escort fighters.

Game Sequence

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- **5 VP** for having the only un-disordered unit within 5 inches of the ferry.
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- **5 VP** for having the only un-disordered unit within 5 inches of the point where the path exits the eastern table edge.
- **Total Victory** – for having more than 11 VPs or more than the enemy.
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The Battle of Cox's Corner – Terrain Map

12 inches



Terrain Effects

- Dry Paddy** - Mainly Open terrain, though criss-crossed with large numbers of low dykes that obstruct movement across country (half speed for Troops and half speed & Breach for Guns), but also provide Soft Cover and Sparse Edge Concealment to units conformed to them.
- Woods** - Dense Area Concealment. Soft Cover. Full speed for Troops. Half speed & Bog Check for guns.
- Wooded Hills** - These are actually more Brush than Woods – Sparse Area Concealment. Soft Cover. Full speed for Troops. Half speed for Guns.
- Stream** - Half speed for Troops. Breach & Bog Check for Guns. Much of the Kyetpaung Chaung had thick vegetation along its banks, so add plenty of foliage (with the odd gap) and class as Low Hedgerow (Sparse Edge Concealment. Soft Cover. Half speed for Troops. Breach & Bog Check for Guns).
- Gully** - Sparse Edge Concealment. Hard Cover. Half Speed for Troops to Cross or move along. Breach & Bog Check for Guns.
- River** - The Pi Chaung (the main river) and the Praing Chaung (the tributary that joins the Pi Chaung at Walagan) are impassable.
- Crest Line** - Blocks line of sight. Knife-edge ridges are standard-issue in Burma.
- Path** - Treat as Open terrain. There is no penalty for crossing a Stream or Gully if following the path.
- B.U.S.** - Wooden buildings, often built of very flimsy materials, but the locals would often surround them with banks and hedges and even air raid shelters. These are rambling settlements, so there is no 'Street' terrain type in between them.
- Pagoda** - A two-storey, stone Built-Up Sector.

Scenario-Balancing Options

This is a fairly balanced scenario – the Africans have the overall advantage of numbers, but their individual Manoeuvre Elements are much weaker than their Japanese equivalents and they are at a distinct qualitative disadvantage compared to the veteran Japanese. However, if you require balancing options, I suggest selecting one of the following:

Favouring the Japanese

- The Japanese used a single 150mm howitzer during the battles at Kyauktaw a few days earlier and theoretically, it should have the range from Pagoda Hill to reach the battlefield at Cox's Corner. Therefore, add a Forward Observer to Kobayashi's force, with **x1** 150mm Howitzer in direct support.
- The Regimental Gun Company and 9th Company of the 111th Regiment were in transit at this time and didn't reach the battlefield until late March. However, you could skew history slightly and assume that one or both companies arrived early enough to take part in this battle. The Regimental Gun Company consists of **x1** Commander, **x2** 75mm Regimental Guns, **x2** Pack Mules and **x1** Forward Observer.
- Add a pair of **x2** Antiaircraft Machine Guns as attachments to your force.

Favouring the Africans

- Air support will become available on a roll of 8, 9 or 0.

Cards Required

You will need the **Battlefront: WWII Far East Card Supplement** to play this scenario.

British-Indian XIVth Army

14A-10	Jeep
14A-11	15cwt Truck
14A-14	Bofors 40mm Antiaircraft Gun
14A-16	3.7-inch Mountain Howitzer
14A-17	Infantry
14A-18	Commander
14A-20	Forward Observer
14A-25	3-inch Mortar
14A-26	Hurricane Mk IIc Fighter-Bomber
BR-P85	Vengeance Dive-Bomber
BR-P92	Hurricane Mk IV Fighter-Bomber

Japanese

JA-10	Type 92 70mm Battalion Gun
JA-17	Riflemen
JA-19	Commander
JA-21	Type 92 Heavy Machine Gun
JA-25	Type 89 50mm Grenade Discharger

Generic

Pack Mules

Umpire's Eyes Only

- When the African player makes a successful call for Air Support, secretly roll a die or flip a coin. There is a 50/50 chance that the air strike will hit Allied positions. Historically, the RAF hit 'A' Company on Point 172, so hit that if there are still troops on it. Otherwise hit any company that is wandering about in the open on the western fringes of the position. In this instance, it will not return for a strafing run. 'Friendly Fire' will occur a maximum of one in the game.
- Note that the Japanese have the initiative in this scenario and the game should open in the first turn with a Japanese ambush on 'C' Company, so make sure that 'C' Company deploys within 0-5 inches of the Japanese. The Japanese have already identified the extent of the African position from their position in the hills and have had time to adapt and redeploy against the African dispositions. Consequently, the Africans are stuck with a rigid deployment, whereas the Japanese have the freedom to deploy wherever they wish within their deployment area after the Africans have made their deployment.